

2014 -- H 7947

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2014

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION - THE RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION ACT

Introduced By: Representatives McNamara, Valencia, Amore, Ackerman, and
Shekarchi

Date Introduced: March 19, 2014

Referred To: House Health, Education & Welfare

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 16-97 of the General Laws entitled "The Rhode Island Board of
2 Education Act" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:
3 **16-97-8. Pilot program to increase college persistence and success.** – (a) Purpose: A
4 significant percentage of Rhode Island adults have earned some college credit but have not
5 completed the requirements, and obtained the requisite number of credits, to obtain a college
6 degree. The lack of a college degree can prevent individuals from obtaining gainful employment
7 and advancing in the workplace. Further, the fewer residents with degrees, the less likely
8 employers can locate and obtain skilled, well-qualified candidates for open positions, and the less
9 likely Rhode Island will attract and retain new businesses with growth potential. Many of the
10 adults described above, due to life circumstances, face considerable challenges in pursuing further
11 education by traditional means, and are left without a viable alternative to obtaining a degree.
12 Specially-designed, innovative, and adoptable higher education alternatives involving distance
13 education and instructional scaffolds may support underserved adult residents, remove barriers to
14 educational opportunities, and increase higher education graduation rates for Rhode Island
15 residents. Accordingly, there shall be a three (3) year pilot program designed to test these
16 alternatives; to test the effectiveness of a regionally-accredited, non-profit, public, degree-
17 completion institution in Rhode Island; to gather data related to distance learning with
18 instructional supports; and to inform the Rhode Island board of education of the effect of certain
19 higher education alternatives that may impact statewide, higher education policy. The pilot

1 program shall be delivered through a partnership between the pilot program facilitators, Charter
2 Oak State College and College Unbound, and the pilot program evaluator, the Rhode Island
3 partnership project.

4 (b) Pilot Program facilitators: (1) Charter Oak State College (COSC): COSC is a public,
5 non-profit, degree-completion, degree-granting institution accredited by the New England
6 Association of Schools and Colleges that awards postsecondary degrees and certificates at the
7 associate and baccalaureate levels. COSC (originally named Board for State Academic Awards)
8 was founded in 1973 by the Connecticut State legislature to serve the educational needs of adults
9 and, non-traditional students in innovative ways. Originally, COSC offered associate degrees
10 based on validation of credits and, by 1977, had gained approval to offer baccalaureate degrees.
11 It used the local libraries to host and assist with academic advising. It aggregated credits that
12 students earned at other regionally accredited institutions; through nationally recognized testing,
13 recognized review processes; and through its own special credit assessment, testing, and portfolio
14 assessment. In 1992, COSC introduced independent study and video-based courses. As it began
15 offering its own courses, COSC recognized a need for library access and greater student support
16 services and developed a partnership with the Connecticut state library and cooperating library
17 service units. In 2013, seeing student demand for in-person support while its students enrolled in
18 online courses, COSC partnered with College Unbound.

19 (2) College Unbound, a division of The Big Picture Company, a duly-authorized
20 domestic non-profit that has generated and sustained personalized learning environments for over
21 fifteen (15) years, seeks to integrate students' own purposes and visions for learning with the
22 needs of their workplaces and communities. College Unbound's curricular model of online
23 instruction partnered with on-ground, in-person cohort learning is built to support adults, who
24 work and attend school, both on a full-time basis. Coursework is connected to necessary
25 workplace skills and on-ground cohorts are comprised of colleagues in the field or workplace, in
26 order to develop cultures of collaboration and cooperation. It seeks to raise the quality and
27 applicability of students' education, to improve post-secondary student accessibility, graduation,
28 long-term success rates, and to build students as leaders in their professional and personal lives.
29 College Unbound utilizes out-of-the-classroom settings and serves students who might not
30 otherwise successfully achieve a higher education degree. College Unbound is in its fifth (5th)
31 year of offering on-ground student instructional and support services to adult learners in Rhode
32 Island.

33 (c) Method of delivering services: COSC, working collaboratively with College Unbound
34 through the duration of this three (3) year pilot program, may establish and maintain within the

1 borders of the state of Rhode Island a facility or location where instruction, student services and
2 educational program administration are provided or postsecondary educational credentials are
3 granted to persons in the state or to persons outside of the state by contracting with College
4 Unbound to facilitate these services. Further COSC, through its collaboration with College
5 Unbound, on the ground, in Rhode Island, may: (1) give counsel to, enroll or seek to enroll
6 students for education offered by the institution; and (2) offer to award educational credentials for
7 remuneration.

8 (d) Program components:

9 (1) Eligible program participants – An adult learner or student who:

10 (i) Has obtained at least nine (9) college-level credit hours prior to enrollment in the pilot
11 program;

12 (ii) Is not younger than age twenty-one (21);

13 (iii) Has a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent; and

14 (iv) Does not have a degree from an institution of higher education.

15 (2) The program shall:

16 (i) Serve no more than one thousand (1000) eligible program participants;

17 (ii) Use a proactive, team-oriented approach to learning; and

18 (iii) Hold weekly, cohort, instructional and/or student support meetings with eligible
19 program participants throughout the academic year.

20 (3) Evaluations:

21 (i) Evaluations shall be conducted by the Rhode Island Partnership Project (RIPP), a
22 project established in September, 2012 with support from the Rhode Island office of higher
23 education to address the skills gap in Rhode Island and increase the number of its residents who
24 complete postsecondary education and earn a bachelor's degree, associate's degree, or
25 certificate.

26 (ii) COSC, through its collaboration with College Unbound, shall work with RIPP to
27 track persistence and completion outcomes for eligible program participants.

28 (iii) RIPP shall provide a report to the board of education and the appropriate
29 committee(s) of the general assembly that include the evaluation and information on best
30 practices and lessons learned during the pilot program described in this section.

31 (iv) RIPP shall disseminate the report to the public by making the report available on the
32 office of higher education's website.

33 (4) Supplement not supplant: The purpose of this pilot program is to supplement and not
34 supplant other instructional or degree-granting programs in the state of Rhode Island, and other

1 [data-collection processes currently employed within the state to obtain such information.](#)

2 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION - THE RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION ACT

1 This act would establish a three (3) year pilot program to supplement and assist students
2 formerly enrolled in college to obtain college degrees. The program would be limited to no more
3 than one thousand (1,000) participants and would be delivered through a partnership among
4 program facilitators and a program evaluator.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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